

INSTRUCTIONS

RELATIVE TO

SELF-PRESERVATION

DURING THE PREVALENCE OF

CONTAGIOUS DISEASES.

BY A PHYSICIAN.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

CONTAGIOUS and Malignant Fevers have of late prevailed and still continue to prevail, to an unusual extent, in the metropolis and other parts of the kingdom. The contagion is, unknowingly, carried from place to place by numbers; who, if they were made acquainted with the necessary precautions and directions, would cease to be the propagators of infection, and would be enabled to nip the evil, whether in themselves or others, in the bud.

This is a subject which concerns persons of every description, but more especially

cially the heads of families and proprietors of schools. It has attracted the notice, and employed the pen, of Dr. Haygarth, and other able and philanthropic physicians; but none of these Gentlemen appear to us to have treated this subject upon a plan, adapted to the use of the better class of Housekeepers;—a plan which we have attempted in the following pages.

London, May 1st,

1801.

P. S. While this pamphlet has been printing, a new performance has appeared, from the pen of Dr. Haygarth, entitled “*A Letter to Dr. Percival, on the Prevention of Infectious Fevers, read to the Literary and Philosophical Society of Bath;*” but as this treatise, which exhibits so fine a specimen of patient research and just reasoning, will, it is probable, be read only by those who belong to the medical profession; it will not supersede the necessity of a set of instructions designed, like the present, for the use of the community at large.

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INSTRUCTIONS, &c.

THOSE are Contagious Fevers which are communicated from the sick to persons about them, such persons having been before in good health, or not having been previously disordered in a similar manner. Whenever, therefore, one individual in a family is confined to his bed by a feverish complaint, and shortly after a second or third individual of that family, or one who, though not residing under the same roof, has approached the person of the sick, is seized with similar symptoms; there can be no doubt of the fever being of a contagious or infectious nature.

Under

Under such circumstances, none but the necessary attendants should have access to the sick, and these attendants should have as little communication as possible with the rest of the family. Nurses, being generally advanced in years, habituated to fatigue, and little liable to hurry of spirits, do not readily receive infection; yet it is requisite for them to keep their clothes and persons clean, not only on their own account, but for the sake of others also. Clothes that have, for several days, imbibed the effluvia emitted from the body of the sick communicate the contagion, perhaps more powerfully than the body itself of the patient. It is, therefore, of great consequence that the nurse's clothes be changed at least every third day. She should also wash her hands, face, neck, and arms with cold water twice in the day.

day. It is another proper regulation, in such cases, that the nurse and attendants eat their meals in a separate room, without mixing with the rest of the servants.

Much greater precaution is requisite on the part of Relatives. With a mind depressed by apprehensions and distracted by grief, and a body weakened by assiduity and watching, how great is the risk to which a wife or a mother is exposed on such an occasion! Duty and affection disregard the danger; and it is soothing to the sick to have their dearest connexions about them. But while she is the minister of consolation to a languishing partner or an expiring offspring, let not the wife or the mother neglect her own preservation. The observance of a few precautions will not interfere
with

with conjugal or parental duty, and may be the means of preventing an accumulation of distress.

She should not go into the sick-room with an empty stomach ; * while there, she should frequently smell at a handkerchief moistened with strong vinegar, but not with perfumes ; and both then, and on coming out of the room, she should spit the saliva out of her mouth, and blow her nose. In very bad cases it will further be advisable to rinse the mouth well with cold water. She should guard against inhaling the patient's breath, by holding a handkerchief to her mouth, or turning aside the head, when very near him. After remaining some time by the

* Part of what is here said forms the sixth and last of Dr. Haygarth's Rules printed by the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor. Similar directions had been given by Dr. Lind some years ago.

bedside of the sick person, she should take a walk or a ride in the open air, if the weather be favourable. The fresh air, at the same time that it dissolves and wafts away the contagious effluvia adhering to the clothes, invigorates the body and enables it to resist infection. In all the histories of pestilential diseases, we find that those persons, whose occupations or habits of life led them to pass most of their time out of doors, either escaped infection entirely, or took it only in a mild degree. It is scarcely necessary to add, that washing the hands, face, neck and arms will be as necessary in the instance of the mistress of the family, as in the case of the nurse ; * over whom she will enjoy the advantage of a daily

* The use of the shower-bath, or immersion in the cold bath would be preferable in most instances.

change of linen and garments. The diet should be conformable to the directions hereafter given on that head.

Visitors cannot always be kept away on such occasions, though they generally do great harm to the patient by their conversation, and run considerable risk of infection. They should stay as short a time as possible in the sick chamber, and on coming out, should use the precautions above recommended; in particular, they should immediately go into the open air.

According to the state of mind, the body becomes more or less disposed to receive infection. It is, therefore, of great consequence that the spirits be not suffered to be too much depressed by apprehension and grief. A just confidence,

fidence, on the part of the patient's relatives, in the medical attendants (as instruments in the hands of Providence) will serve to keep the mind from sinking too low, and will have a most beneficial influence on the body. The most poignant grief, the bitterest affliction, should not rob us of that portion of mental fortitude, which, under such circumstances, is so essential to our preservation.

In regard to diet and mode of living, no general rules can be given, except that it will be proper to adhere to that sort of food and drink, and those hours of taking them, which have been customary; and in case of fatigue, to support the spirits and strength by moderate quantities of wine. A celebrated American physician, who has seen much of the Yellow Fever, and written much
upon

upon it, recommends a sparing diet, chiefly vegetable, with plain water, (or at most thin small beer or very weak wine and water) during the prevalence of contagious disorders; but although this mode of living may be suited to his own constitution,* and to that of some others in the climate of Philadelphia or the West Indies; yet we are persuaded it will not agree with the majority of British constitutions, or even with foreigners resident in Britain. On the other hand, a very full or luxurious diet would be equally improper. A moderate quantity of animal food, (not omitting vegetables,) joined with a moderate quantity of well fermented liquor, and with a few glasses of red

* Notwithstanding his abstemious diet, Dr. Rush took the infection of the Yellow Fever, and was dangerously ill.

port to those who are accustomed to the use of wine, will, in most instances, be advisable. If the weather should be very warm, the proportion of butcher's meat should be diminished, and that of vegetables increased. At such seasons, pickles and ripe (but somewhat acid) fruits, are highly salutary.—Daily exercise should not be neglected.

Before we quit the subject of diet and regimen, it will be expected that we should take notice of some reputed *Preservatives* against infection, such as camphor-bags, the smoking of tobacco, &c. It is a very common practice with people who go in the way of malignant fevers to carry about them a piece or two of camphor tied up in muslin, or kept loose in the pockets. This can do no harm; but it must not alone be relied upon, nor lead to a neglect

lect of those more certain measures which we have before pointed out ; otherwise disappointment and mischief will ensue.—With more reason has the smoking of tobacco been recommended by many medical authors. It is related that in the Great Plague at London the tobacconists escaped infection ; and the celebrated Dutch physician, Diemerbroek, attributes his not taking the infection, while the plague raged at Nimeguen, to the frequent use of the pipe ; yet it will not avail if the other leading precautions are neglected. We find that many tobacco-smokers fell victims to the contagion which raged at Moscow.* A tea spoonful of Huxham's tincture of bark, taken in a wine glass full of cold water, may be recommended as the best preservative remedy in most

* De Merten's Account of the Plague at Moscow, published by Rivington, London, 1799,

cases ;

cases; the other general precautions being at the same time attended to.

We come now to the management of the *Sick-room*. This should constantly be kept clean, cool, and well aired. It is chiefly owing to the heat, closeness and filthiness of their low and crowded habitations, that the poor suffer from contagious fevers, in so much greater a proportion than persons of better condition.* In mild and warm weather the windows and doors should be kept open throughout the day; and the doors, (in hot weather, a part of the windows) also throughout the night. We shall add from Dr. Haygarth,

* See Dr. Murray's Remarks on the Situation of the Poor in the Metropolis; as contributing to the Progress of Contagious Diseases, lately published by Hatchard, Piccadilly, and Rivington, St. Paul's Church-Yard.

that

that the bed-curtains should never be close drawn round the patient ; but only on the side next the light, so as to shade the face. It was owing to the salutary effects of ventilation and coolness, that, during the raging of the Yellow Fever at Philadelphia in 1798, so few of the sick who were removed to tents died, in comparison of the numbers that were carried off in the town.* At the same time that plenty of fresh air is admitted into the patient's chamber, care must be taken that it be not over-heated by a large fire, especially in the night ; when less of the external air is admitted. In warm weather, there should be no fire during

* Two thousand persons in the tents lost but 17 in 25 days, while the same number in Philadelphia lost 178! Currie's Memoirs of the Yellow Fever, Philadelphia, 1798.

the day, and scarcely any during the night. All the writers on pestilential epidemics agree in stating, that those persons, (such as cooks and bakers,) whose occupations exposed them to much heat, suffered the most severely. To that description of persons for whose use these Instructions are intended, there can be little occasion to mention that all discharges from the patient's body should be immediately taken away, and that the patient's body-linen and bed-linen should be frequently changed.

The floor of the sick room should be (what is termed) dry-mopped, at least once a day. It may afterwards be sprinkled with vinegar. In addition to this, the room may be fumigated with nitrous vapour, in the manner described by Dr. Carmichael Smith. — Lastly,
after

after the patient or corpse is removed, the bedding should be taken away to be washed, fumigated, and aired ;* the room should be well scoured ; the ceiling white-washed and the walls new-painted or papered ; the doors and windows remaining open for a fortnight or longer, by night as well as by day, if the weather permit. Through neglect of these precautions, contagion has in numberless instances, been harboured, for many months, in the bedding or walls of the room where a fever-patient lay ; to the constant danger and occasional infection of those who have afterwards slept in it.

* In very malignant cases the bedding should be destroyed.

THE END.